

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Bob Stump, Chairman

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN BOB STUMP GENERAL DEBATE ON H.R. 4546 FY 2003 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. Speaker, on May 1, the Armed Services Committee reported H.R. 4546 on a strong bipartisan vote of 57 to 1.

The bill authorizes appropriations for the Department of Defense and for the Department of Energy national security programs for a total of \$383 billion in budget authority, consistent with the President's budget and the House-passed budget resolution.

Over the next few hours, we will debate and explain the many initiatives contained in this bill to support and strengthen our armed forces during this critical period in our nation's history. I am pleased to once again be able to report to my colleagues, that this legislation embodies the same bipartisan spirit that has guided U.S. national security policy for decades.

It provides for the pay, housing, fiscal and physical well-being of our service members and their families. It provides for the research and acquisition of our military arsenal so critical to maintaining our combat edge on the battlefield. It provides for the resources and tools necessary to properly train our forces to be ready to defend our freedoms around the world at a moment's notice. And it also provides for our nation's military retirees who devoted a better part of their lives in service to their country.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very good bill. It follows the spending blueprint set forth by the President to make this defense budget the largest since 1990. It also marks the largest single-year increase in defense spending since 1966. By marking the fifth consecutive year of real increases in defense spending, we are starting to dig out of the budget hole created after 13 years of cuts.

Our armed forces, while still the most formidable fighting force on the planet, face serious and fundamental choices in the years ahead. This presents both an opportunity and a risk if the choices we make are not prudent and do not hedge our bets against the inevitable surprises and challenges that lie ahead.

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The bill before the House sets that prudent course. It recognizes today's new reality and accelerates and emphasizes new tools necessary for the critical fight against terrorism. It makes sure that our most precious military resource - our men and women in uniform - are properly compensated and taken care of. And it also makes sure that we do not forget the basics - the unglamorous elements of the defense budget necessary to make sure it all works when called upon.

Mr. Speaker, on a personal note, this will mark the last defense authorization bill that I will have privilege to manage before this great House. It has been an honor to have the trust of my colleagues to be able to lead two great committees over the past eight years and I will greatly miss the friendship and bipartisan sense of mission that allows the Veterans Affairs and Armed Services committees to quietly and effectively do their important work on behalf our nation's veterans and military forces.

I urge all my colleagues to support this important legislation and reserve the balance of my time.

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